

**AGENDA ITEM III C 1**

**PROPOSED ACADEMIC PROGRAM**

**LOUISIANA TECH UNIVERSITY**

**M.S. IN HEALTH INFORMATION MANAGEMENT**

## **AGENDA ITEM III C 1**

### **PROPOSED ACADEMIC PROGRAM**

#### **LOUISIANA TECH UNIVERSITY**

#### **M.S. IN HEALTH INFORMATION MANAGEMENT**

##### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Louisiana Tech University currently offers the A.S. in Health Information Technology and B.S. in Health Information Administration programs. The associate program prepares students to sit for the American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA) Registered Health Information Technician (RHIT ) Examination. If successful on this exam, graduates may use the RHIT credential and enter professional practice as such in Louisiana and across the nation. The baccalaureate program prepares students to sit for the AHIMA Registered Health Information Administrator (RHIA ) Examination. If successful on this exam, graduates may use the RHIA credential and enter professional practice as such in Louisiana and across the nation. Both of these programs are appropriately accredited.

The proposed master-level program is designed to accomplish two goals: (1) to prepare students not previously educated as an RHIA professional to sit for licensure; and (2) to provide further professional and management education for RHIA professionals. There is no unique licensure available for graduates of this program, nor are there any specific accreditation requirements for this program.

##### **OVERVIEW OF PROPOSED PROGRAM**

Briefly, the proposed program is 39 hours in length that will be made available to students completely online. A thesis will not be required, but research projects will be required upon completion of each core area. There is no such program currently available in Louisiana and only two nationwide. Student enrollment/graduation is estimated as follows:

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Enrollment	25	40	50	75	100
Graduates	0	20	20	25	25

Students must possess a bachelor's degree to enter the program. If the baccalaureate degree is in an area other than HIM, experience in a related field and prerequisite courses will be required. Two additional faculty---one in 2005 to relieve undergraduate courses loads of existing faculty and one in 2007 for graduate support---will be needed. No other additional materials/support will be required. Additional faculty costs (approximately 100K) will be covered through existing resources (reallocation of current additional University funding, additional tuition revenue, etc.).

## **REVIEW BY EXTERNAL CONSULTANTS**

Upon submittal of this proposal by the University, the staff engaged the services of a team of external consultants to conduct an on-site review and assessment. This team was composed of: Dr. Stuart Speedie, Graduate Coordinator of Health Informatics, University of Minnesota-Twin Cities (Chair); and Dr. Karen Wager, Associate Director, Health Information Administration, Medical University of South Carolina. The staff summary which follows contrasts consultants observations and recommendations with institutional responses.

### **STRENGTHS WHICH THE REVIEW COMMITTEE IDENTIFIED**

#### **PROPOSED CURRICULUM IS GENERALLY WELL-DESIGNED**

##### **Report:**

The proposed M.S. in HIM curriculum is a well designed program that conforms to national recommendations regarding its content, structure and organization. We expect that its educational program will help address the need for advanced training in health information management and will prepare a new group of HIM professionals with the knowledge and skills needed to meet the changing information management needs of the health care industry.

#### **NEED IS EVIDENT**

##### **Report:**

There is significant evidence of the need for such a program both nationally and locally. Offering the program via distance education will make it even more attractive to potential students, by enabling them to complete their training while continuing to work in their home communities.

#### **FACULTY ARE DEDICATED AND ENTHUSIASTIC**

##### **Report:**

The faculty are all HIM professionals who are active in their associations at local, state and national levels. The current students and practitioners with whom we met spoke very highly of the HIM faculty and described them as enthusiastic and committed teachers. We were also impressed with the faculty's support of the program and interest in furthering their own professional development by pursuing advanced degrees and by enrolling in discipline-appropriate continuing education programs.

## **FACULTY ARE FAMILIAR WITH DISTANCE EDUCATION**

### **Report:**

The HIM faculty has experience in distance education and should be well prepared to deliver the course work in the online format.

## **COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT IS STRONG**

### **Report:**

The administration at both the collegiate and university level is enthusiastic and supportive of the program and has expressed their commitment to the program's success by allocating the necessary additional financial resources.

## **WEAKNESS AND PROBLEMATIC AREAS WHICH THE REVIEW COMMITTEE IDENTIFIED, WITH RESPONSES FROM LOUISIANA TECH UNIVERSITY**

### **CURRICULAR REFINEMENTS NEEDED**

### **Report Recommendation:**

**The department shall modify the curriculum to include a capstone course, occasional face-to-face meetings with students and reformulate the extensive prerequisites as an RHIA credentialing track.**

### **Response:**

The department is currently revising the curriculum to include a capstone course. Face to face meetings will occur via video web conferencing. Each student will have access to this capability. The capabilities include face to face conferencing between students and between student and faculty.

Appropriate software and hardware will be provided to the student at the time of enrollment. This face to face process will provide student to student and student to faculty interaction while eliminating travel costs and time away from work. As the program develops and student numbers increase in various locations, it is planned and budgeted for faculty to travel to these areas to have occasional "in person" meetings with the students. The faculty and the accrediting body both view the concept of a truly "web-based" program as a strength and a uniqueness that will attract and retain students. To implement a requirement for students to come to campus will prevent many students from entering the program. Organizations, such as the U.S. Department of Defense, are interested in the program because of the program's flexibility and portability. Students can learn from anywhere at any time making the program attractive to professionals who

have full-time commitments as well as to international students.

The “extensive” prerequisites that were identified by the consultants were established in order to meet the requirements of accreditation/approval by AHIMA. It is our intent to offer an AHIMA approved master’s degree. Only students who do not possess an undergraduate credential in Health Information Management will be subject to these requirements and those students who are subject to the requirements will be evaluated on an individual basis for possible transfer credit. The curriculum that was previously presented is currently under revision to reflect collaboration with other units on campus. The curriculum will include courses taught by Psychology as well as a capstone course. This will strengthen the curriculum by incorporating a broader range of expertise and diversity.

### **FACULTY LACK DIVERSE TRAINING AND BACKGROUNDS**

#### **Report Observation:**

The faculty who would be teaching in the proposed program lack diverse training and backgrounds. All completed their undergraduate HIM education at LTU and none currently hold doctoral degrees. We believe that the quality of the proposed educational program could be strengthened by exploring more fully opportunities for collaboration with other units on campus, such as with faculty with expertise in computer science, engineering and/or business administration.

#### **Staff Note:**

See University response pp. 6-7.

### **NEW PH.D.-TRAINED MENTOR FACULTY MEMBER IS ESSENTIAL**

#### **Report Observation and Recommendation:**

There is a great need to recruit and retain a Ph.D. trained faculty member with expertise in this area. Although we recognize that it may be difficult to recruit a PhD with undergraduate or graduate training in HIM per se, we believe the program could recruit an individual with appropriate training in a related field such as health or nursing informatics, information systems management, health administration, or health services research. This individual could serve as a mentor and foster collaborative research among HIM faculty.

[Accordingly]:

**LTU will commit the necessary additional resources to hire a PhD level faculty member who will provide a model of scholarly activity for the other faculty to emulate.**

**Response:**

Louisiana Tech University commits the resources necessary to hire a faculty member for the 2006–2007 academic year that holds the PhD or appropriate doctoral degree. Because there is no PhD or doctorate in Health Information Management, the degree will be in a related area. In order to meet the requirements for program approval by the American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA), the university will also require that the individual hold the credential awarded by AHIMA. In addition, three of the present faculty members in the Department of Health Information Management are pursuing doctoral degrees.

**FACULTY SCHOLARSHIP IS LACKING**

**Report Observations and Recommendations:**

Faculty will likely have difficulty succeeding professionally with significant investment in them and clarification as to administration's expectations related to their scholarly work. Projected teaching loads are high for faculty teaching in graduate programs and will likely make it difficult for this faculty to succeed at scholarly pursuits. Yet scholarly activity is at the heart of most graduate programs. Hiring a Ph.D. trained faculty member who can provide a model of scholarship for others to emulate is important. Equally important is for faculty to have reasonable teaching load and well defined expectations in the area of scholarship. We saw no evidence of well articulated scholarly expectations of faculty by the college administration.

[Accordingly]:

- 1. LTU shall develop a plan for guiding faculty members into advanced educational programs that will train them in the skills necessary for scholarly productivity.**
- 2. LTU shall reduce teaching demands on the faculty to allow them sufficient time for scholarly pursuits.**
- 3. The college and the department will collaborate to develop a clear and explicit set of expectations about what constitutes success for the program and what is expected of each faculty member in terms of scholarly productivity.**

**Response:**

As stated above, three of five faculty members in the Department of Health Information Management are pursuing doctoral degrees in related fields. These doctoral programs require training in scholarship. The university offers vigorous faculty development programs for the development and enhancement of research and scholarly skills; faculty are encouraged to attend the programs. The two remaining faculty members have primary responsibility for the undergraduate programs offered within the department.

An additional faculty member was hired in fall of 2004 and has assumed undergraduate teaching loads of faculty who will be teaching in the Masters program in the fall of 2005, if approved. The addition of another faculty member (1 above) who will be teaching graduate courses will be assigned an appropriate graduate teaching load as defined by the policies of the College of Applied and Natural Sciences and the University. Expectations for instruction, research and service are defined for all undergraduate and graduate faculty in the *Tenure, Promotion and Merit Guidelines* of the College of Applied and Natural Sciences (see attached document). With the additional faculty in the Department of Health Information Management, teaching demands will be reduced so that faculty can engage in appropriate scholarly activities.

The department and college have defined clear and explicit expectations for success of the program in terms of student numbers and expected graduates. Instruction, research, service and collegiality expectations of all faculty members in the College of Applied & Natural Sciences are clearly defined in the *Tenure, Promotion and Merit Guidelines* of the College of Applied and Natural Sciences.

### **PROGRAM MARKETING/STUDENT RECRUITMENT PLANS ARE NECESSARY**

#### **Report Observation and Recommendation:**

We saw no evidence of a comprehensive and systematic marketing and student recruitment plan. The program will likely not be able to meet its student enrollment goals without having such a plan in place.

[Accordingly]:

**The department, the college and the university will develop and fund a marketing plan to inform a broad range of potential students of the program.**

#### **Response:**

A comprehensive marketing plan has been developed and will be deployed upon program approval. The plan includes detailed postings to the Department, College and University websites as well as email to professional list-serves. Web postings and marketing will also be provided by the American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA) in support of this program. The department will conduct a direct marketing campaign in April and October as a part of the Louisiana Health Information Management Association (LHIMA) and AHIMA state and national conventions. These direct marketing materials are being developed in collaboration with the Department of Marketing and Public Relations at Louisiana Tech University in order to recruit a broad range of students for the program. The budget had been increased in order to successfully fulfill this requirement.

## CONCLUSION OF THE REVIEW COMMITTEE, WITH A RESPONSE FROM LOUISIANA TECH UNIVERSITY

### Report:

Given our assessment of the program's strengths and areas of concern, we view there are two viable alternatives. The first is to proceed with a MS in HIM as proposed; the second is to offer a professional master's degree (i.e., Masters in Health Information Management) instead. Each is described below.

#### Alternative 1: Masters of Science

The Master of Science (M.S.) degree itself is typically viewed by most research universities (like LTU) as an *academic-oriented* degree where students are engaged in research or scholarly activity and work with faculty who can serve as mentors. We are concerned that given the limited training and scholarly productivity of the current HIM faculty, that this option is overly ambitious. In all likelihood, the program will be held by fellow faculty to the standards of graduate education in academia and will have great difficulty in meeting those standards.

#### Alternative 2: Professional Masters Degree

The Council of Graduate Schools defines a Professional Master's degree as follows:

*The CGS Professional Master's initiatives are designed to help member institutions respond to documented local and regional workforce needs and student interest/demand for master's programs that prepare graduates for entry-level careers in business, government and non-profit (BGN) employment sectors.*

In such a program, the institution acknowledges that the purpose of the program is explicitly to meet workforce needs by offering an advanced program of education to prepare people who can meet those needs. While scholarly productivity is still a desirable attribute of the faculty, the more important considerations are their level of skill in the field of interest, the quality of their teaching and the curriculum that is offered. This description is a perfect fit for the proposed HIM Masters degree program. It is a program that will offer advanced training beyond the currently available baccalaureate. It is preparing its students to meet a very explicit need for health information management in health care. The faculty members are all highly skilled in HIM, their quality of teaching is superb and the curriculum as a whole is well defined and fully in conformance with national standards promulgated by the American Health Information Management Association.



This alternative offers LTU the opportunity to offer a needed and important program of training at an advanced level. It also provides an appropriate level of expectation of the scholarly productivity of the faculty and provides a “protected environment” in which the faculty can grow in scholarship as they gain advanced training. As the faculty mature and develop scholarship skills, such a program can evolve into the more traditionally defined program of study represented by the Masters of Science degree. We suggest that the program will ultimately be stronger and will better serve the needs of the citizens of Louisiana if the Louisiana Tech University and the Board of Regents would chose to pursue this second course of action.

**Response:**

Faculty in the Department of Health Information Management agree with the consultant’s suggestion to **change the title of the proposed program from a Master of Science in Health Information Management to a professional masters degree, with the title Master in Health Information Management.** The professional degree title will better reflect the intent of the program, which is to offer a professional degree that prepares individuals to meet workforce needs.

**STAFF ANALYSIS**

The University has taken the consultants recommendations seriously and has either addressed their concerns directly or instituted processes to accomplish needed remediation. Because there are outstanding issues, however, progress reports should be required.

***STAFF RECOMMENDATION***

***The staff recommends that the Academic and Student Affairs Committee grant conditional approval for the proposed Master of Health Information Management program (CIP Code 51.0706) at Louisiana Tech University, to be implemented beginning Fall, 2005, with the following stipulations:***

- 1. By July 15, 2005 , the University shall submit to the Commissioner of Higher Education a program enhancement plan which contains:***
  - a. specific steps to address current faculty needs for educational and scholarly development;***
  - b. specific steps for program marketing and student recruitment;***
  - c. specific steps for the hiring of two new faculty (one appropriately credentialed individual to alleviate high undergraduate teaching loads and one appropriately credentialed Ph.D. faculty to teach graduate coursework and to mentor faculty scholarship efforts) by Fall, 2006.***
- 2. By July 15, 2006, the University shall submit to the Commissioner of Higher Education a progress report addressing full implementation of the above plan.***